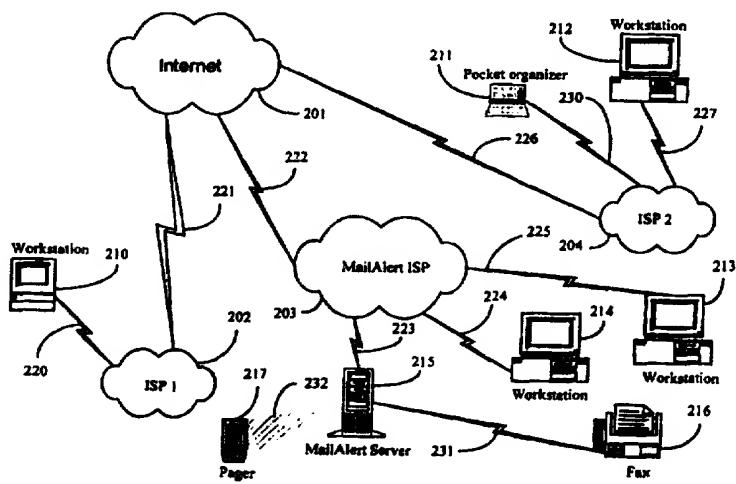




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(54) Title: ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEM FOR RECEIVING AND FORWARDING E-MAIL MESSAGES BASED ON SUBSCRIBER SUPPLIED CRITERIA



(57) Abstract

An e-mail system implemented on a server (215) having a network connection (220, 222, 223, 226, 227) receives and forwards e-mail messages based on subscriber-supplied criteria. When a message is received addressed to the subscriber (210, 212, 213, 214), characteristics of the message, such as existence of and size of attachments, are compared to characteristics previously supplied by the subscriber. If a match is found, the subscriber is notified, such as by a page to a pager (217) carried by the subscriber, of the message and the nature of the match. Facility is provided at the server for the subscriber to then call the server, log on, and provide instructions for forwarding the matched message. Forwarding may be to such as handheld device or a notebook computer (211) operated by the subscriber, or to a mailbox of mailboxes on other servers, or any combination. A subscriber is then in control of points of delivery of incoming e-mail messages.

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ELECTRONIC MAIL SYSTEM FOR RECEIVING AND FORWARDING E-MAIL MESSAGES BASED ON SUBSCRIBER SUPPLIED CRITERIA

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Field of the Invention

The present invention is in the area of network document services, and pertains more particularly to an electronic mail (e-mail) service utilizing machine-intelligent filters to determine forwarding and notification for receipt of e-mail.

Background of the Invention

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The public network system over telephone lines known as the Internet, and particularly the portion of the Internet known as the World Wide WEB (WWW) has experienced rapid growth, and with this growth all sorts of electronic document services have been developed and provided to users. E-mail is arguably the most familiar of these services, and is provided by every Internet Service Provider (ISP) and in other ways as well. E-mail services may also be provided on other networks, such as Wide Area Networks (WANs) and the like.

Even though e-mail services have become commonplace and reliable, there are still some limitations. For example, e-mail services typically require the user to actively look up whether he or she has received e-mail, unless the user is permanently connected to the Internet. In some service packages, e-mail is delivered to a mobile device, like a palmtop-computer or a telephone. However costs in such systems are high per message and size, and if the user has no facility to review and veto delivery, he or she may receive attachments of several dozen kilobytes or even more incurring very high delivery costs. What

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is clearly needed is a smart filter system that operates firstly to decide, based upon certain criteria set up by the user, if, when e-mail is received, the user is to be notified by pager or similar services, and secondly if and where to forward mail. Such an enhancement in e-mail services allows
5 the user to avoid being disturbed by unimportant messages, as well as to avoid high costs of unsolicited and or unwanted mail reception on expensive wireless systems or other remote systems.

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Summary of the Invention

In a preferred embodiment, a system for receiving and forwarding e-mail messages for a subscriber is provided. The system comprises a server connected to a network; and a Mail Alert code set
15 resident and operable on the server. The MailAlert code set is adapted to compare characteristics of e-mail messages received for the subscriber to specific message characteristics provided by the subscriber and pre-stored on the server, to send a message to the subscriber when a characteristic match is found, and to execute following instructions from
20 the subscriber for forwarding of the message received for which a match was found. In one embodiment the message sent to the subscriber on finding a characteristic match is sent to a pager carried by the subscriber.

On receiving a page that a matched message has been intercepted, the server running the MailAlert code set waits for
25 instructions from the subscriber. The subscriber may call in, log in by such as name and password, and then select specific forwarding for the intercepted and matched message. Forwarding may be to any or any combination of a number of devices capable of receiving the e-mail message. The subscriber, for example, may have the message forwarded

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to a hand-held or notebook computer carried and operated by the subscriber, and also to a postoffice on another server or ISP

In various embodiments of the invention facility is thus provided for a subscriber to avoid having long messages sent to a remote device, such as a hand-held computer or notebook computer, and may thereby gain cost control over such message transfers. Another distinct advantage is that the subscriber, in the case of Internet services, becomes once-removed from his own Internet Service Provider (ISP), and can than change providers and e-mail systems, and still receive his e-mail seamlessly, and may have mail delivered to several places or any combination. A user may, for example, simply supply a criteria that all mail be intercepted and held for later instructions, and thereby gain control of delivery points.

15

Brief Description of the Drawing Figures

Fig. 1A is a first of two portions of an example of software, in pseudo code, as it might be used in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

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Fig. 1B is a second portion of an example of software, in pseudo code, as it might be used in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

Fig. 2 shows a system topology including interconnection of all units in a preferred embodiment of the present invention.

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Description of the Preferred Embodiments

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In a preferred embodiment a server is used, connected to a network such as the Internet as well as to the phone system to perform the required functions of the invention

As can be seen from the Figures and as described below, most of 5 the implementation of embodiments of the present invention is in interconnection of apparatus, and in integration of the apparatus by unique software resident and executed on a server. It will be apparent to those with skill in the art that there are many ways to partition such a 10 system, and both the topology and the software partition can be changed substantially without really changing the resulting function of the complete system. Therefore the following descriptions have to be 15 viewed as only one embodiment among many possible embodiments.

In Figs. 1A and 1B, a rich pseudo code is used to illustrate how 20 the core software is built, with addition of most-used modules. Lines 106 through 114 define the program objects. Lines 119 through 158 show a list of concurrent and invoked tasks. In line 106 MailAlert is defined as the principle code routine in the embodiment described. Mail Server described in line 108 could be a basic version of UNIX™ SendMail, a widely used standard mail software.

25 SendMail does receive mail from the Internet, typically using Simple Mail Transfer Protocol(SMTP).

In the embodiment described herein of the present invention, when e-mail is received, a copy is typically forwarded to the customer's normal base address. A copy is also retained on the server, which is then 25 analyzed by the MailFilter code routine on line 110. A match of pre-programmed criteria with mail message characteristics generates an Alert, which on Line 111 is used to generate a page to a paging unit carried by the subscriber. Additionally, each page is complemented with a unique ID stamp for identification. In line 113 and 114 the subscriber 30 can request either a fax back or a forwarding of the specific message by

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phone using the id stamp from line 112. That could happen in several ways. In one instance, the user would call an operator, identify himself, tell the operator the ID stamp of the requested message, and tell also the means, fax, e-mail or similar, and location of the forwarding, by e-mail address, fax number or similar. In the other instance, he would call into a voice-response system, identify himself by either touching or speaking his customer id, then entering the message ID stamp, and then selecting one of several pre-selected destinations, or enter a method and an address again by means of touching or speaking.

10 Procedure MailAlert on lines 119 through 127 basically repeats all basic steps indefinitely. In line 121 are the tasks of Receive, Forward and Store Mail, which can be handled by standard packages such as SendMail of UNIX™. Other similar products can be substituted, or modified or adapted to perform in the desired manner.

15 In line 133, a Filter Mail procedure filters new incoming mail, then looks up the customer for whom it was received in the customer database, gets stored customer records including pre-stored e-mail filtering criteria, and checks for a match, storing relevant results in the alert table.

20 In line 138 the task SendAlerts is continuously taking record by record from the AlertTable and emptying into paging systems, according to instructions stored in that record by FilterMail from the customer record.

25 The task MailAlert Auto Attendant on lines 144-149 takes customer calls, and based on customer ID and Alert ID then does either a fax or mail forward of the relevant messages. Optionally, attachments can be included to be expanded or dropped.

The task MailAlert Fax Back Server is then used to actually work off the queue of faxes to be sent to customers.

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Fig. 2 shows how a typical topology might look in a preferred embodiment of the present invention. A mail sender can be sending e-mail from workstation or PC 210, via Internet connection 220 to Internet Service Provider (ISP) 202. Although in this example the 5 connection is through the well-known Internet, practice of the present invention is not limited to use with the Internet. The MailAlert system of the invention may be practiced wherever e-mail is used, regardless of the nature of the Network. The Internet is exemplary. The mail is then forwarded via link 221 to "backbone" 201, and on to MailAlert ISP 203 10 via connection 222 to the backbone. Inside MailAlert ISP the mail is received by Server 215 via connection 223 from the subnet 203. The MailAlert software then forwards a copy to the subscriber (If we call the same person both subscriber and customer, confusion is sure to result. on workstation 212, via connection 227, the subscriber's ISP 204, 15 connection 226, backbone 201, connection 222, MailAlert ISP 203 and connection 223. At the same time, if a match between criteria and message characteristics is found, the system alerts via telephone and paging network 232 the subscriber's pager 217. The subscriber then can call in and have the message forwarded to fax 216 via telephone 20 network connection 231, or he can have it forwarded to an alternate mail address, in this example is represented by pocket organizer 211, which has a wireless link to ISP 204. That (what is "that") then connects 25 in normal manner from server 215.

If the subscriber has Internet service from the same ISP as 25 MailAlert, he could connect like workstation 213 via connection 225.

The here-presented system provides an ability to selectively filter information based on e-mail, and to notify a subscriber of availability of such selected information, giving the subscriber the subscriber an option to have the message forwarded either by e-mail or 30 fax to a specific location. For example, if a subscriber expects a

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- document as an attachment by e-mail, but is only interested in comments contained in the copy (body) of the message, he may setup a filter as following: Filter1:Sender=XYZ:Subject=ABC:Attachment=Yes;. This Filter would tell the filter software to look for matches in this subscriber's incoming mail. Once a message is received that matches the criteria, the subscriber will receive a page that could look like : MsgID=1234, Filter1. The subscriber then can call the Auto Attendant and identify himself with Customer ID and password, upon which he will be prompted to enter the message ID.
- 5 Next he can select means of delivery, like e-mail or fax, and then enter numbers or addresses, or select one of a limited set of preprogrammed numbers or addresses.
- 10 After the subscriber makes all of the needed selections and entries, the system will immediately start to process his request, and
- 15 within seconds delivery should begin. Alternatively, instead of using a pager, many models of new digital phones have paging facilities, so the message could include the call back number, which can be dialed in single button access. In another embodiment two-way pagers may be used to allow selecting immediate forwarding based on preprogrammed
- 20 numbers or addresses.
- In yet another embodiment, mail messages or parts of mail messages meeting certain criteria can be included with the notification message. It will be apparent to those with skill in the art that there are many alterations that may be made in the embodiments described
- 25 herein without departing from the spirit and scope of the invention. For example, programming of the filter criteria can be achieved in any one of several ways, all of which should be familiar to those with skill in the art. Programming of all of the several functional modules of the Mail Alert System according to embodiments of the invention can be done in
- 30 many different ways, according to individual preferences of

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programmers, while falling within the scope of the invention. Moreover, there are alternatives that may be taken in hardware connection, also while falling within the spirit and scope of the invention. The invention, therefore, is defined by the scope of the following claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A system for receiving and forwarding e-mail messages for a subscriber, the system comprising:
 - 5 a server connected to a network; and
 - a Mail Alert code set resident and operable on the server;
 - wherein the MailAlert code set is adapted to compare characteristics of e-mail messages received for the subscriber to specific message characteristics provided by the subscriber and pre-stored on the
 - 10 server, to alert the subscriber when a characteristic match is found, and to execute following instructions from the subscriber for forwarding of the message received for which a match was found.
2. A system as in claim 1 wherein the subscriber is alerted on finding a characteristic match by sending a page to a paging device carried by the subscriber.
- 15 3. A system as in claim 1 further comprising a human interface whereby an operator causes received and matched mail to be forwarded to mail addresses provided by the subscriber responding to the alert by conversing with the operator via telephone.
- 20 4. A system as in claim 1 further comprising a telephone menu system whereby a subscriber, responding to an alert, may log in, identify messages, select from recorded options, and input information for forwarding of identified messages.
- 25 5. An e-mail server comprising:
 - an e-mail system adapted for receiving and forwarding e-mail;
 - 30 and

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a Mail Alert system adapted to compare characteristics of e-mail messages received for the subscriber to specific message characteristics provided by the subscriber and pre-stored on the server, to alert the subscriber when a characteristic match is found, and to execute
5 following instructions from the subscriber for forwarding of the message received for which a match was found.

6. An e-mail server as in claim 5 wherein the subscriber is alerted on
10 finding a characteristic match by sending a page to a paging device carried by the subscriber.

7. An e-mail server as in claim 5 further comprising a human interface whereby an operator causes received and matched mail to be forwarded
15 to mail addresses provided by the subscriber responding to the alert by conversing with the operator via telephone.

8. An e-mail server as in claim 5 further comprising a telephone menu system whereby a subscriber, responding to an alert, may log in, identify
20 messages, select from recorded options, and input information for forwarding of identified messages.

9. A method for receiving, filtering, and routing e-mail messages, comprising steps of:

- 25 (a) prerecording on a mail server characteristics for messages to be routed, the characteristics provided by a subscriber;
- (b) receiving messages addressed to the subscriber at the mail server;
- (c) comparing characteristics of messages received to the
30 prerecorded characteristics provided by the subscriber;

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- (d) identifying and storing on the mail server messages received for the subscriber for which a match is found to the prerecorded characteristics;
- (e) alerting the subscriber to the receipt of one or more messages for which a characteristic match is found; and
- (f) forwarding the stored messages for which a match is found to destinations provided by the subscriber in response to the alert.
10. The method of claim 9 wherein, in the alerting step, a page is sent to a pager carried by the subscriber to alert the subscriber to the receipt of the one or more messages.
11. The method of claim 9 wherein, in the forwarding step, an operator enters destinations provided by the subscriber by telephone conversation in response to the alert, and causes the one or more messages to be forwarded.
12. The method of claim 9 wherein, in the forwarding step, a subscriber, in response to the alert, interacts with a phone menu system, identifying messages and selecting destinations for forwarding.
13. A machine-intelligent agent for processing e-mail messages, comprising:
- 25 a stored list of message characteristics provided by a subscriber;
- a receiver adapted for receiving e-mail messages and ascertaining message characteristics of the received messages;
- a comparator adapted for comparing characteristics of received messages with stored characteristics, and tagging those messages wherein the characteristics match; and

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a save facility adapted for storing matched messages against future distribution instructions.

14. The machine-intelligent agent of claim 13 further comprising an alert mechanism for alerting a subscriber to the receipt of messages having characteristics matching the stored characteristics.
5
15. The machine-intelligent agent of claim 14 wherein the alert mechanism comprises a page transmitter adapted for transmitting a page signal to a pager carried by the subscriber.
10
16. The machine-intelligent agent of claim 14 further comprising a forwarding facility for retrieving and forwarding stored messages to destinations provided by the subscriber in response to the alert.
15
17. The machine-intelligent agent of claim 16 wherein the forwarding facility comprises a human interface for identifying messages to be retrieved, retrieving the identified messages, and forwarding the identified messages to destinations provided to an operator by the subscriber.
20
18. The machine-intelligent agent of claim 16 wherein the forwarding facility comprises an automated telephone menu system adapted for providing choices to a subscriber connecting to the forwarding facility by telephone, wherein the subscriber calling in may identify stored messages to be forwarded, and the agent will retrieve and forward the identified messages to destinations provided by the subscriber callin in response to the alert.
25

Fig. 1A - Pseudo Code Representation of Application Software in MailAlert Server annotated for better understanding

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100
101    Bold = objects
102    Italic = actions (methods, code members)
103
104    Core
105
106    MailAlert ISP 203 is the provider of the MailAlert (software on server 215) service.
107    MailAlert relies on a Mail Server (software on server 215) package for Mail
108    processing.
109    The Mail Server receives Mail for Customers (e.g. message sent by 210) and forwards
110    it to their permanent mail address (e.g. Workstation 212 on ISP2 204), also stores a Mail
111    Copy (on server 215).
112    An Alert (e.g. data content of pager message) is a basic information provided by
113    MailAlert to Customers (e.g. using pager 217 via paging network 232).
114    The Mail Filter (also software on server 215) analyzes the Mail Copy (content of e-
115    mail message), looking for Interest Criteria (in database on server 215). When a
116    match is found, an Alert is generated.
117    Alerts are records in an Alert Table (also database on server 215). For each Alert
118    Record, a Pager Message will be generated using Sends Alerts (software on server
119    215).
120    Every Alert is stamped with a unique identifier for the Customer receiving it.
121    A Customer, using the Alert identifier can request from a MailAlert Auto Attendant
122    the whole contents of the Mail Copy to be faxed to them (on Fax machine 216) or
123    forwarding to a special e-mail address (e.g. mobile device 211). The MailAlert Auto
124    Attendant will add a Fax Back Record into a Fax Back List (database on server 215).
125    For each Fax Back Record, a Fax Message will be generated and send using a Fax
126    Back Server (software on server 215).
127
128
129
130    task Receive, Forward Mail; Store Mail Copies is
131        provided by third party Mail Server package for release 1.0

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Fig. 1B - Pseudo Code Representation of Application Software in MailAlert Server (Continued)

```
132  
133     task Filter Mail Copies is  
134         forever  
135             Wait For New MailCopy  
136             MailCopy :: GetCustomer() :: FindMatchAlertCriteria( MailCopy,  
AlertTable )  
137  
138     task Send Alerts is  
139         forever  
140             if not AlertTable :: isEmpty() then  
141                 AlertTable :: currentRecord :: SendAlert()  
142                 AlertTable :: currentRecord :: delete  
143  
144     task MailAlert Auto Attendant is  
145         forever  
146             Wait For Customer Call  
147             Request Parameters( Customer Id, Alert Id,Fax/Mail )  
148             if Fax then FaxBackList :: AddFaxBackRecord( CustomerId, AlertId )  
149             if Mail then Forward (CustomerId, AlertId, AltMailAdd )  
150  
151  
152  
153  
154  
155     task MailAlert Fax Back Server is  
156         forever  
157             if not FaxBackList :: isEmpty() then  
158                 FaxBackList :: FirstRecord() :: GenerateFax()
```

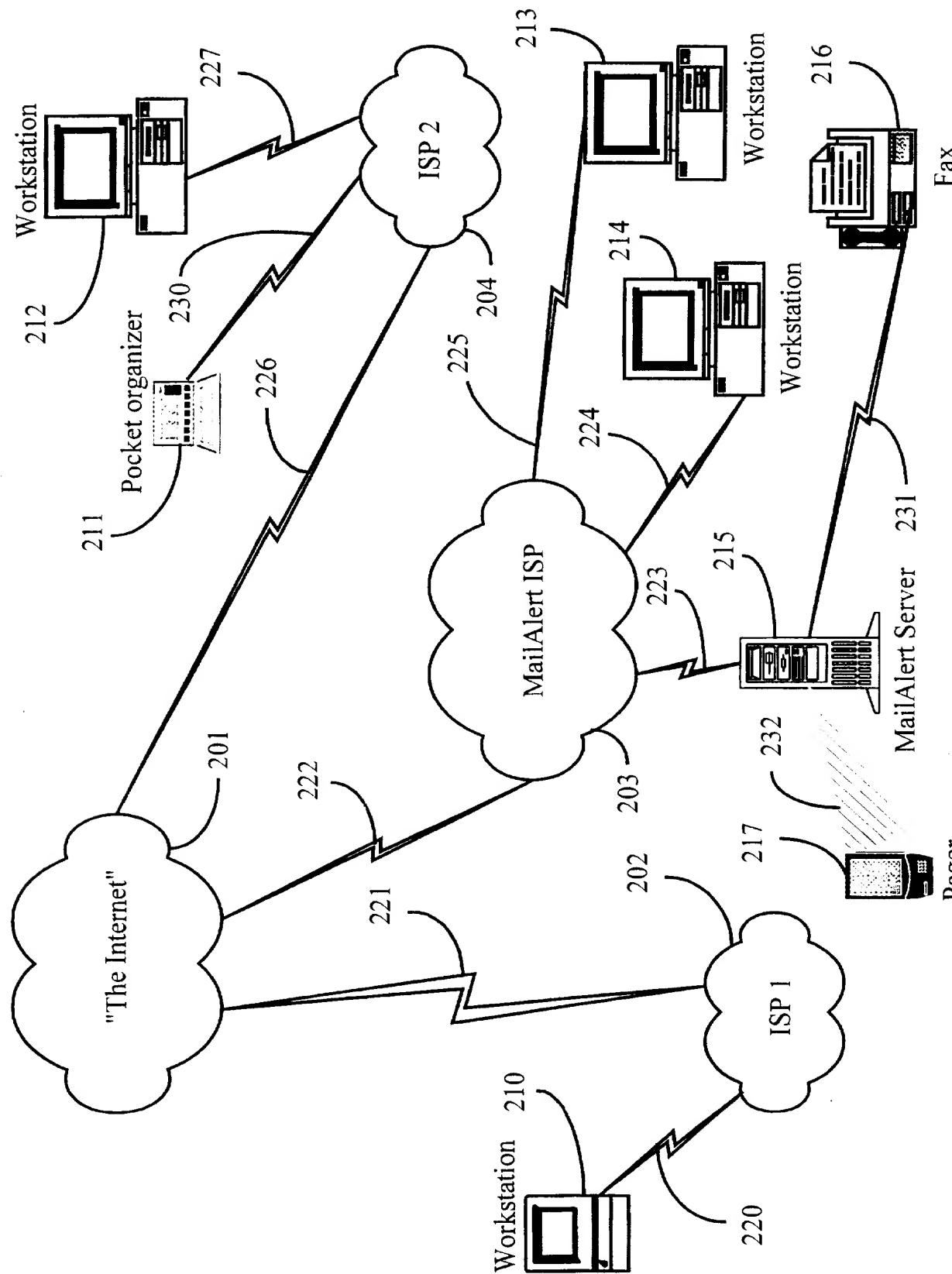


Fig. 2 - Topology Example

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US97/12932

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : G06F 13/00
US CL : 395/200.36; 379/100.08

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 395/186, 200.36, 200.37, 200.47, 200.53, 200.68, 201, 800.01; 379/67, 90.01, 100.05-100.08; 455/31.1, 412

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

NONE

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

Please See Extra Sheet.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,487,100 A (KANE) 23 January 1996, see abstract and column 1, line 65 - column 2, line 38.	1-18
X	US 5,483,466 A (KAWAHARA ET AL.) 09 January 1996, see abstract and column 2, line 20 - column 6, line 1.	1-18
A	US 5,377,354 A (SCANNELL ET AL.) 27 December 1994, see abstract and column 2, line 34 - column 3, line 11.	1-18
A	US 5,265,033 A (VAJK ET AL.) 23 November 1993, see abstract and column 1, line 60 - column 2, line 68.	1-18

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:	"T"	later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
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P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed		

Date of the actual completion of the international search

09 OCTOBER 1997

Date of mailing of the international search report

17 NOV 1997

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT/US97/12932

C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	US 5,040,141 A (YAZIMA ET AL.) 13 August 1991, see abstract and column 2, lines 14-41.	1-18

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

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B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Electronic data bases consulted (Name of data base and where practicable terms used):

APS

Searched Terms: electronic or e-mail, client/user/subscriber/customer, servers, networks, comparator, packets or messages etc.